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Chairman Bulova Issues Statement on Lorton Workhouse

For Immediate Release

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FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA—“In 2002, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors was offered a valuable opportunity to purchase 2,440 acres of federal land at a very low cost (\$4.2 million). This property was the site of a former prison workhouse, a 56 acre site in Lorton.

The Lorton Reformatory, originally known as *The Occoquan Workhouse*, first opened in 1910, two years after President Theodore Roosevelt ordered a penal commission to investigate overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at the District of Columbia jail. When it was new the Lorton Reformatory served as a pioneer in corrections, helping non-violent offenders to master a trade, work in the outdoors to learn farming and to turn their lives around. The attractive Colonial Revival brick buildings were constructed by prisoners. The Workhouse is a remnant from the progressive reform movement and has been designated a historic landmark.

Sadly, the prison became a blight on the community during the latter part of the 1900's when more dangerous prisoners were sent to Lorton from the District to serve time. The community was elated when a decision was made by Congress in 1998 to close the prison. Congressman Tom Davis, who had previously served as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, arranged for a transfer of the prison site and surrounding lands to the County. An intensive community planning process followed to adopt a new Comprehensive Land Use Plan for the area. Because of the site's historic designation, there are many federal restrictions on the way the land can be used.

A creative solution to this challenge was found in 2006, when the Board of Supervisors approved an agreement to allow a community group, The Lorton Arts Foundation (LAF), to renovate and convert the former prison workhouse into an Arts Center. The Foundation went about their mission to stabilize and preserve the workhouse historic site and to establish a positive community amenity to the South County area by ways of arts programming. Funding came from operating revenues, donations and bank loans to pay for renovations.

Since then, the Workhouse Arts Center has served as a prime example of adaptive reuse and revitalization within the County. It has improved the quality of life for area residents, provided vibrant cultural and recreational events and activities, and preserved the site's significant historic legacy.

I have personally attended many successful workshops, fundraisers, and events at the Workhouse, most notably Fairfax County's annual *SpringFest*, an event that drew thousands of people in celebration of Earth Day/Arbor Day. The Workhouse has been able to adaptively reuse County owned land to provide exciting services to Fairfax County residents.

However, like many non-profits and businesses alike, the LAF has not been immune to the economic recession and slow recovery. Simply put, the past few years have proven an intensely difficult time to raise money for the arts, and the Workhouse Arts Center's operations have not generated enough revenue to cover expenses, especially debt it incurred for capital renovations. While the financial issues associated with the Workhouse are unfortunate, the Board of Supervisors has elected to preserve the Workhouse as an important community amenity. The Lorton Arts Center Board will be reconstituted and strengthened with closer County oversight. Issues related to LAF indebtedness, under this settlement, will be resolved.

By preserving this important cultural and historic landmark our Board remains true to the community's efforts to maintain and improve and a quality of life that will serve County residents in the long-term."

Chairman Sharon Bulova
Fairfax County Board of Supervisors

For more information, see [Fairfax County news release](#).

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